

Part 2: The Hand of God

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Summary: A story to complete the Hand of God but not the mystery. Not yet.

Part 2: The Hand of God

Act 1

"I printed a Google Map of 38.87780-104.88," Shane said. It is in the heart of the Garden of the Gods Park. Not much more than a wide bowl with a hiking trail going through it."

"Thank you Ms McInerney," Oliver said.

"It's within two miles of a visitor parking lot," she added, watching him carefully. He had been in a very formal mood since their dinner three nights ago and she had been trying to figure out why. At times he was almost standoffish and very unlike the Oliver she had grown to love. When she had suggested dinner again yesterday, he had made a very thin excuse to say no. Even the Hershey's Kiss she had left on his desk that morning had been pushed casually to one side. What is bugging you Oliver, she wondered?

"Oliver," Rita called out. "I just got off the phone with Clauson Monument Works. The ladies name is Sharon and she says there are no records going back as far as you need to go. They switched everything over to digital two decades ago and she does not know where the boxed paper files have gone."

"Was she able to find out who is paying the rent?"

"No one there has any idea who is paying the rent on that sepulcher."

"Auguste Rodin has done some remarkable work," Shane said from her floating station. "I did not know he was the one who sculpted The Thinker. Some of this is very romantic stuff."

Oliver put his head next to hers to look at the screen. When she moved to brush her cheek against his, he flinched away. Norman walked over to look.

"Oh," he said suddenly. "We have that one here."

"Which one?" Shane asked.

Norman pointed to the monitor at the Hand of God. "That one. It's on the shelf at the very back of the DLO."

Oliver followed as Norman grabbed a stepstool and carefully maneuvered his way around their grizzly. After reaching very high, and straining on tiptoe, he grasped something and pulled it to the front and then stepped down with it. It was a six inch tall version of the Hand of God, identical in every way to the large one waiting in the sepulcher.

"It's been up there for as long as I can remember," he said. "Oh," he added suddenly, hefting the piece carefully. "It isn't a sculpture, it's a plaster casting."

"I have been here for years," Oliver said. "And I don't remember seeing it at all."

"It's called scotoma," Norman said. "The mind sees what it wants to see. You probably noticed it at some point, but as time passed, you erased it from your memory." He handed the small statue to Oliver.

Shane walked to stand beside him, deliberately bumping his hip with her own. Oliver moved half a step away. "Perfect," she said. "And now there is another one. Is there an inscription?"

Oliver turned the small statue over. There were words carved into the bottom of the plaster. "Undercroft, Poe & Howe." Beneath that, "Joseph Lindley O'Toole."

"Sounds like lawyers," Shane offered, giving Oliver one of her very rare what-the-heck-is-your-problem looks. He didn't see it. Or ignored it.

Oliver handed her the casting and picked up the plaque they had found inside the sepulcher. "To my descendant, the one who finds the key. 38.87780-104.88 north then west. Go there and you might understand the key to faith. Tell me how I opened that boulder as a young man and you will know."

"Are we off to Undercroft, Poe & Howe?" Shane asked.

"Lead the way, Ms McInerney."

Act 2

The sign on the door said, "Undercroft, Poe & Howe, Barristers; Customs and Import Law. It was a very old company with only one employee, a subsidiary of a British Firm. Oliver and Shane were sitting patiently in the office of Ruth Wonderly. Waiting as she rummaged through files in another room. Along one wall were dozens of

black and white photographs all taken around the turn of the century. Part of the display was a very old, and battered yoke used to join oxen to farm equipment. Shane stared at it, remembering what it was, but not remembering where she had seen one before.

"Curious," Oliver said, motioning toward several diplomas hanging on one wall.

"What?" Shane asked as she snaked her hand into his.

"Besides law, Wonderly has a Masters in Theology and a Masters of Divinity. Very well versed for an attorney."

A second later when Wonderly, a woman well advanced in years, came back into the room, Oliver snaked his hand out of Shane's.

Shane stared at the side of his face and frowned. "Oliver, I need to ask you something."

"Later, Ms McInerney."

"You are the great grandson of Joseph Lindley O'Toole?" Ruth Wonderly asked.

"Yes I am."

Wonderly opened the folder she had brought to her desk and began to read. "To my descendant, the one who finds the key. 38.87780-104.88 north then west. Go there and you might understand the key to faith. Tell me how I opened that boulder as a young man and you will know." Have you been to examine the boulder?"

"No, not yet. We plan to go this weekend."

"Well then," she said, closing the folder. "There is not much for us to discuss."

"There must be something you can tell us?" Oliver said.

"Joseph O'Toole was a devout man," she said. "He wanted to make sure his descendant was also a devout man. Until that would prove itself, he wanted the iteration of The Hand of God that you found to remain his possession only. The question of how he split that boulder must be answered before anything else can happen."

Oliver frowned and steepled his fingers together in front of his face. Shane knew that as a gesture of deep concentration so she said nothing. "According to my father, his grandfather Joseph was practically penniless when he passed. My concern is knowledge only, not money. So can you tell me how he managed to establish a Trust Fund to rent that sepulcher?"

Wonderly stared at Oliver for what seemed like a long time, contemplatively chewing the inside of one cheek. Finally, she nodded. "Mr. O'Toole, the rent for the sepulcher was paid on an annual basis and the monies come from a Trust established by the Maryhill Museum of Art."

Shane pulled out her laptop and started clacking at keys.

"Rent is to be paid until such time as a descendant of Joseph Lindley O'Toole can answer the question about faith. At such time, ownership of the statue transfers to said descendant and the remainder of the Trust reverts back to the Maryhill Museum."

"The Maryhill Museum is in Oregon, on a cliff above the Columbia River," Shane whispered.

Wonderly smiled at her. "Your Ms McInerney is correct, the Maryhill Museum is in Oregon. It is a very beautiful place."

"How in the world did my great grandfather become involved with a Museum of Art in Oregon?"

"In 1907 Samuel Hill purchased 5,300 acres of land above the Columbia River and in 1914 started building a mansion with a panoramic view of the river below. But the remote location was an insurmountable obstacle at the time and construction on the mansion stopped in 1917. LoÃ-e Fuller, a pioneer of modern dance in Paris convinced Hill to turn the mansion into a museum of art."

At the mention of Paris, Shane sat bolt upright, listening intently.

"Fuller's association with French artists provided the core of the museum's collection.

Most notable were the works of Auguste Rodin."

"My great grandfather would have been a young man then."

Wonderly nodded. "Apparently he traveled to Oregon to meet Rodin and the two became good friends. When O'Toole, by then a poet laureate, returned to Denver, Rodin accompanied him and set about carving a chess set out of marble. Apparently, LoÃ-e Fuller traveled with them."

"The O'Tooles and the French conneciton," Shane chuffed quietly. "I should have known." Oliver heard it and laughed.

Wonderly frowned at them both. "As I have already stated, Joseph O'Toole was a devout man. If you answer the question he demands, Oliver, you will also inherit his writings. Among them some very serious Bible studies regarding the similarity between the human soul and marble. Which of course fascinated Rodin. Both the human soul and marble develop in layers and become mature over time. Granted, the time is measured in years for one and eons for the other, but the similarity remains. For example, an infant has no wisdom other than to love her mother. Wisdom is added over time. Marble is not a rock that is pushed out of the earth like basalt, it is a metamorphic that forms in layers, which makes it very slow in geologic terms but durable and excellent for sculpting. Likewise, the human soul is also durable but can be split in two by a single crack. Do you see?" She peered intently at both Oliver and Shane.

He nodded, looking uncomfortable. Shane was staring back at the woman, twisting her mouth from one side to the other every few seconds. She was obviously wrestling with asking something. Then she shrank back when the woman looked directly at her.

Wonderly laughed at the reaction. "Joseph's favorite scriptural analogy was Romans 9:20-21. He liked to paraphrase it this way. If God chooses to form you and Oliver a certain way, who are you to object? Who are you to reply against God? Will the sculpture formed say to Him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not God have power over the marble, to make one vessel for honor and one for dishonor?" But there is danger. The human soul is like a boulder, it can be broken by a single crack. The good news is that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Oliver and Shane both smiled then, they had been down this road already and understood.

"A rumor among those who knew the three at the time," Wonderly continued, "was that there was an ongoing debate among O'Toole, Rodin and Fuller about the identity of the man and woman in The Hand of God. Rodin would eventually say that it was Adam and Eve. Fuller insisted that it was Ruth and Boaz from the Old Testament. But O'Toole felt that the couple would not be identified for quite some time, and once admitted that he felt the man was one of his own descendants. But would resolutely never say why."

Oliver and Shane shared the same gasp.

Wonderly laughed again. "Now, that makes it interesting doesn't it?"

"Those are names I have been hearing off and on for the last few months," Shane said. "Who are Ruth and Boaz?"

"You should study that one, Child," Ruth Wonderly said. "In the files left by Joseph Lindley O'Toole was a photograph given to him by a brother, Ailbert O'Toole. Yes, I can see by the look on your face you already know, and honestly, until I saw you walk in here, I did not believe the myth Joseph held onto about one of his descendants. But you are the image of the Ghost Lady. So I have a feeling that you and Ruth have a great deal in common. When God made Eve for Adam, she was meant to be his equal in every aspect save one. He was appointed to lead the two and therefore accept responsibility for every decision. But she was to be his helpmate, one who gives help, relief, and support. Adam and Eve were meant to complement each other, not compete. I like to think that when Ruth covered her feet with the robes of Boaz, she was accepting him as the one to redeem the land of her mother in law, but I also believe that she was also asking him to accept her as something else. I believe she was asking him to accept her for who she was and allow her to walk at his side."

"What do you mean, she covered her feet with his robes?"

"Well, it was harvest time and the land owner would often sleep in threshing house along with the hired help. To show her intention toward Boaz, Ruth entered the threshing house and lay down at the man's feet and then covered her own feet with his robes. A very symbolic gesture as I have already mentioned. But he understood what she meant and they were married. Ruth is one of the Gentiles named in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. You'll find that in Matthew chapter one. You just never know where your faith is going to take you."

Oliver took one look at the side of Shane's face and could see the wheels turning madly inside. Will she get it, he wondered? I hope so.

Act 3

Shane held Oliver's hand tightly as they followed the twisty trail through a large grove of Douglas Fir. The trees parted suddenly and they both blinked at the sudden flash of sunshine.

"Wow," Shane said, brushing up against his side. She felt him flinch and frowned, that reaction was becoming more frequent. Is there something wrong with me, she wondered? She let go of his hand and started down the gentle slope into the bowl of the Cathedral Valley.

The valley was awash with the green of elm, the gray-green of fir and pine, and the warmer, yellowish green of grass. Rising out all that green, like the fingers of a giant's hand, were the very tall, red ochre spires of sandstone that gave the place its name. On the opposite side of the bowl was a very high, very jagged blade of the same stone nearly three quarters of a mile wide, the backdrop of what someone had looked at once and named Cathedral.

"It almost does look like a church with high walls and columns of rock holding the sky up. The trees do seem to be paying attention."

"Excellent observation, Ms McInerney. And Biblical."

"I just said something Biblical?"

"The mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands," Oliver quoted.

Shane laughed and Oliver smiled at the music of the sound, a hymn of joy given to the Cathedral.

"How are we to find one boulder among all of this?" she asked.

I was a very good question. The trail they followed was a twisty piece of work that offered no clues. In front of them were boulders of all sizes, rock formations protruding upward among the trees, and a thick carpet of grass.

The trail twisted sharply around a group of fir and pine and just like that they found what they had come to find. It was a small clearing, roughly eighty feet in diameter. In the middle was what had been a boulder just slightly smaller than Shane's house. Or it had been. Now it was split, the halves lying apart with a very large pine tree growing out of the middle.

Sitting on one of the halves was a small black cat diligently cleaning the back of one paw. Shane froze when she saw the cat, and stared suspiciously. She watched as Oliver approached the split boulder and shook her head. He doesn't seem to see the cat. Now what is this about? The cat looked up at her suddenly and blinked large yellow eyes. Shane looked from Oliver to the cat and back several times.

"What do you see?" asked the still small voice at the back of her mind.

Her head snapped back to the cat but it was ignoring her now. What am I supposed to see? Hello?

Shane walked closer, looking carefully at the house sized stone lying in two pieces. How did Joseph Lindley O'Toole break this in half? Something was nagging at the back of her mind, digging like a burr under a saddle blanket. Shane turned and walked twenty paces back, and then twenty more.

When she turned and looked again, the revelation came like a flood and she gasped, and then sat on a boulder, blinking with bewilderment. It all made such perfect sense. The boulder, the statue, Oliver and Holly, and most importantly, her shared future with Oliver.

The cat was staring right at her and not moving. Oliver still hadn't noticed it sitting there even though he was now only a few feet away. The strength of the revelation was so great that she started laughing and looked down between her feet before Oliver noticed. Growing exactly where her eyes fell were five small, yellow flowers. Each had four petals and each was smaller than her thumb nail. At the center of each flower were very small seed pods on stamens.

I know what this is, she thought. Wild mustard. Very carefully, she reached and plucked one of the stamens and rolled it between thumb and finger. The seeds that came out were very small, and the words of last Sunday's sermon drifted through her mind, "if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move."

"Oh Oliver," she mumbled, staring at the seed. When she looked up, he was walking towards her. She waved at her rocky perch, inviting him to sit. "Oliver, there is something that I need to talk to you about."

"A cathedral is a very good place to do that," he said.

She leaned against him and felt him flinch once more. "That," she said.

"What?"

"You flinched away from me, and I have been noticing it more and more. I am a very affectionate person, Oliver. I love affection, and I love expressing affection. So my question to you is, is there a problem between us that causes you to avoid displays of affection?"

When Oliver's shoulders sagged, she knew that she had been right.

"Be patient," the still small voice whispered between her ears.

Minutes passed and he said nothing, he didn't even move. She was about to reach out and take his hand when she noticed a tear running

down his cheek.

"I know a man who gave in to the lure of desire. After, he could see the truth in the eyes of his lover, could read what was written on her face. Because they were not yet married, he had disrespected her and even though she had willingly participated, she began to separate herself from him. When they did get married, it was a sham. The fissure he had place between them drove them apart, which made it very easy for her to run off to Paris without looking back."

To watch the tears roll off his face was heartbreaking, but Shane steeled herself, knowing he had to get it out.

"To fail again, my beloved Shane, to fail you would be more than I can bear. I don't flinch from you because I have no desire. I flinch because I do. To give in to that would disrespect the three people who mean the most to me; my God, you, the love of my life, and myself. You are the most precious person I have ever met and I cannot imagine life without you. If I were to use you, I would be sewing a scarlet letter to your jacket that says, "CHEAP!" and Shane McInerney is not cheap."

Shane's heart swelled within her, forcing a broad smile onto her face. No one had ever shown her such respect and it touched her deeply.

"You incredible, loveable dork. Oliver, I know the difference between being used and being loved."

"Please don't say that I am old fashioned."

Shane laughed. "But Mr. O'Toole, you are old fashioned. And that old fashioned love and sense of propriety is exactly what we need." She turned and carefully wiped at his eyes with the sleeve of her shirt. "To suppress what we feel because we are afraid, is as damaging as throwing off all restraint and wallowing in it. Remember the yoke in Ruth Wonderly's office?"

"Ah," he said. "Balance the load."

Shane reached around and punched him in the shoulder and he laughed.

"Exactly. Being chaste does not have to be difficult Oliver. I once told you that my flames of passion were none of your business. But much has changed since then. If I may put it bluntly, now they are. Sort of."

Oliver laughed to see the blush creeping up her neck.

"You know what I mean. What I am saying is that between the two of us, we don't have to be afraid, we can be adult enough to know not to play with fire. Love should be celebrated, not suffocated."

"That is what I believed about Holly."

"I am not Holly," she said sharply, and then exhaled. "Oliver, Holly seduced you, deliberately. That is why she lost interest so quickly and could just walk away without a backward glance. And I think that deep down, you know that to be true. You and Holly failed, and it put

a crack in your soul, a fissure in the marble that was Oliver O'Toole. Remember what Wonderly said? The human soul is like a boulder, it can be broken by a single crack. Remember the verse, "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." When the marble breaks, God plays the part of Aguste Rodin and makes something beautiful out of it. A good sculptor cannot hurry the process or the beauty of the finished piece is flawed. But for us to deny the marble's full beauty is also flawed. You taught me that you never really begin to love someone until you know the worst about them and you love them anyway. Oliver you old fashioned dork, I love you. Do you see?"

To answer her question, he turned and kissed her. Two minutes later, when the earth had returned to its proper orbit, Shane took a deep breath and laughed, which set Oliver off and the two tried to share a hug, which caused a sudden loss of balance and tumbled them off the boulder into the grass.

From the top of the split boulder behind them, the little black cat stood, watching with amusement as the two tumbled off the rock. Then with a final flick of its tail, it jumped to the ground and disappeared into the trees.

Still laughing, Oliver and Shane lay on their backs, staring at the sky. She rolled onto her side and propped up her head with her right hand. "That, my love, is the point."

"When I turned around earlier, the look on your face suggested that you had solved this puzzle. Have you?" he asked.

"Joseph Lindley O'Toole was a wise man. He climbed onto that boulder and saw a very small crack. He dropped the seed from a pine cone into the crack and let nature take its course. It didn't happen overnight, it took years, but the most powerful force in the universe is a seed watered with patience. That pine tree standing between the two halves is the proof."

She showed him the mustard seed. "Remember the sermon last Sunday and how patience is one half of this seed and the other half is trust? This is our mustard seed Oliver. With it we practice patience with each other and we trust. Oliver, I don't want anything to come between us, to ruin the sculpture God is making. All we can do is trust Him and trust each other."

She turned and put her feet next to his. "May I borrow your jacket for a moment Mr. O'Toole?"

Oliver removed his jacket, watching her quizzically.

Shane McInerney took his jacket and with a broad smile, used it to cover her feet where they rested next to his. "It's your move Mr. O'Toole."

His laughter filled the bowl called Cathedral Valley to the brim.

End
file.